



Guidance for Travel Outside the U.S.

This handout has been created by the Office of International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) to provide guidance for traveling outside the U.S. for F-1 students. For more information go to [ISSS Travel Resources](#). For general guidance for traveling outside the U.S. go to [SEVP Travel](#). For information about visa renewal, go to [Dept. of State Visa Renewal](#).

Please note that traveling outside the U.S. may involve policies from multiple entities within different U.S. government agencies including the Student Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Embassy/Consulate, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). These policies may not always provide clear guidance and below is the ISSS's general guidance with appropriate links to the relevant government entities.

Travel Documents Guidance:

- I-20- the travel signature for the I-20 is valid for 12 months from the date of the signature. For students on OPT or who have filed for OPT the travel signature is valid for 6 months from the date of the signature for re-entry. To request a travel signature current students will go to [Travel Signature Request Form](#) and OPT students will go to www.tamuc.edu/opt.
- I-94 Arrival/Departure Record- the electronic I-94 record is automatically updated when a student enters or departs the U.S. To access your electronic I-94 record go to [I-94 Access](#). Individuals with paper copy I-94s will need to submit the I-94 before they depart the U.S. For more information, go to [I-94 Fact Sheet](#).
- Visa- the visa grants permission for an individual to enter the U.S. under the visa category. The visa can expire while an individual is within the U.S. and it will generally not impact the status. For more information on the visa go to [Dept. of State Visa](#).
- Passport- the ISSS strongly recommends that students keep their passport valid at all times. CBP regulations for re-entry require an individual's passport to be valid for at least 6 months beyond the date of re-entry with some exceptions (see [Passport Agreement](#)).

General Travel Warnings: The U.S. Department of State has a website for [Travel Alerts and Warnings](#). While these alerts and warnings may be for U.S. citizens we recommend students review this website as well as their country's relevant government website for current travel warnings or alerts.

Students Currently Enrolled in Courses at Texas A&M University-Commerce: F-1 visa students are permitted to travel outside the U.S. during the semester breaks and annual vacation (summer). Below is a list of documents required and recommended when traveling outside the U.S. For more information go to [SEVP Travel](#):

- I-20 with travel signature dated within 12 months of the date of re-entry
- Valid visa (*may* be exception for students traveling to [Canada, Mexico, or adjacent island](#))
- Passport valid for at least 6 months beyond the date of re-entry (*may* be exception for students whose country has a [Passport Agreement](#) with U.S.)

Additional recommended documents:

- Unofficial or official transcript (verification of enrollment letter is *not* required)
- SEVIS I-901 fee receipt of payment
- Proof of financial resources to cover one year of study at A&M-Commerce (\$28,000 undergraduate, \$26,000 graduate, \$20,000 ELI)

Travel Outside the U.S. While Classes are in Session: Students are encouraged to only travel outside the U.S. in the fall/spring semesters during university recognized breaks and holidays. Students traveling outside the U.S. when classes are in session for the fall/spring semesters may be detained at the port of entry when they re-enter the U.S. and required to provide an explanation/documentation for their travel. Academic departments will not issue letters for travel during the fall/spring semesters and the ISSS ***will not*** grant special permission for students to travel outside the U.S. during the fall/spring semesters.

Travel Outside the U.S. in Final Semester: Students traveling outside the U.S. in their final semester after they have filed for OPT may review the section in this handout regarding traveling outside the U.S. with a pending OPT application. Students who choose to travel outside the U.S. during their final semester prior to applying for OPT will need to review the guidance on this handout regarding traveling while classes are in session. The ISSS cannot address how a port of entry officer will evaluate a student's eligibility to return to the U.S. close to the end date of their final semester. There may be inherent risks with port of entry if a student is traveling outside the U.S. and re-entering close to the end date of the final semester. While summer is the recognized vacation for international students traveling and re-entering the U.S. so close to the end date of the final semester or session may carry risks. The ISSS would recommend traveling during this timeframe only if absolutely necessary.

Students on Approved Curricular Practical Training at Texas A&M University-Commerce: There are no "extra" or additional travel regulations for students who are on approved Curricular Practical Training employment. The travel guidance listed in the above two sections applies to CPT students with no additional regulatory requirements.

Travel Outside the U.S. with a Pending Change of Visa Status Application: Once a student has filed a change of visa status application with USCIS they cannot travel outside the U.S. while the application is pending (not approved) with USCIS. If you travel outside while your change of visa status application is pending it will be considered abandoned. You will need to notify the ISSS at Intl.Stu@tamuc.edu of your intent to depart so we can update your SEVIS record to reflect your departure. You will also be required to notify USCIS if you intend to depart the U.S. by calling 1-800-375-5283. To re-enter as an F-1 visa student you will need a new I-20 with a new SEVIS number and you will also be required to pay the SEVIS I-901 fee. You will also be required to apply for the appropriate visa outside the U.S. (preferably in your home country) before you may re-enter the U.S.

Travel Outside the U.S. and Approved Change of Visa Status: Students traveling outside the U.S. who have been approved for a change of visa status within the U.S. will need to apply for a visa (for the visa status they have been approved for) before they may re-enter the U.S. For information about applying for a visa go to [Dept. of State Visa](#).

Travel Outside the U.S. and Terminated SEVIS Record: Students who travel outside the U.S. on a terminated SEVIS record or whose SEVIS record is terminated while they are outside the U.S. will not be allowed to re-enter the U.S. Students will need to request a new I-20 from the ISSS, if eligible, and also pay the SEVIS I-901 fee for the new SEVIS record. A new visa may be required but you will need to consult with the U.S. Consulate in your home country regarding this requirement or go to [SEVP Travel](#).

Travel Outside the U.S. with Pending Reinstatement Application: Once a student has filed a reinstatement application with USCIS they cannot travel outside the U.S. while the application is pending (not approved) with USCIS. If you travel outside while your reinstatement application is pending it will be considered abandoned. You will need to notify the ISSS at Intl.Stu@tamuc.edu of your intent to depart so we can update your SEVIS record to reflect your departure. You will also be required to notify USCIS that you intend to depart the U.S. by calling 1-800-375-5283. To re-enter as an F-1 visa student you will need a new I-20 with a new SEVIS number and you will also be required to pay the SEVIS I-901 fee. A new visa may be required but you will need to consult with the U.S. Consulate in your home country regarding this requirement or go to SEVP Travel.

Travel Outside the U.S. while 12-month OPT Application is Pending: Traveling while your OPT application is pending (not approved) with USCIS has some risks. The ISSS does not recommend students travel outside the U.S. while their OPT application is pending (not approved) with USCIS unless absolutely necessary. For more information go to [SEVP Travel](#) or [SEVP OPT Policy Guidance](#):

- USCIS may send a request for evidence (RFE) regarding your application while you are outside the U.S. If you are outside the U.S. it may be difficult to secure the necessary documents for a response. RFE's generally have a short timeframe to respond and if you fail to respond by the deadline your application will be denied by USCIS.
- While U.S. Customs Border Protection (CBP) guidelines states a student with a pending OPT application may re-enter the U.S. to look for a job but you do not know when your application will be approved. Applications take an average of 2-3 months for USCIS to process but they often take less time. Once approved, you will need to present proof of employment (employment letter or employment offer letter) and your valid EAD card along with the documents listed below.
- If your visa has expired then the U.S. Consulate may not renew your visa until your OPT has been approved.

The documents for traveling outside the U.S. while your OPT application is pending (not approved) with USCIS includes:

- OPT I-20 with travel signature within six months of date of re-entry
- Valid visa (*may* be exception for students traveling to [Canada, Mexico, or adjacent island](#))
- Passport valid for at least 6 months beyond the date of re-entry (*may* be exception for students whose country has a [Passport Agreement](#) with U.S.)
- It is strongly recommended to have a letter of employment or employment offer letter